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Testimony of Gretchen Vivier, MSW
Before the Public Health Committee
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Good morning Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and committee members. My name is Gretchen Vivier. I am the Health Care Organizer at the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW/CT).

I am here to speak about **HB 6675** AN ACT INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE IN CONNECTICUT. It is certainly a good a idea to look into the "most effective use of the temporary increase in federal funds." All of the topics this bill talks about researching are important. However, the legislature just received a report from HealthFirst Connecticut Authority that studied these ideas for 18 months. Not only that, but you have already heard testimony on the SustiNet plan, HB 6600 which also addresses all of these ideas and which was also well researched by leading national experts and put together along with a host of input from Connecticut stakeholders. We would urge you to use that information rather than starting again from scratch.

With your permission, I would also like to comment briefly on a few other related bills.

S. B. No. 678 AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTH CARE COST CONTAINMENT. We support Section 1 that would set up a Connecticut Health Care Cost Containment Authority that would prioritize the use of medical homes, coordinate care more effectively, establish a viable health information exchange, and promote preventive care and wellness programs. This idea was in the HealthFirst report. It is also incorporated into the SustiNet plan. I have it on good authority from Jennifer Jaff of Advocacy for Patients with Chronic Illness that this would help her clients, but that the chronic disease management part of SustiNet would be even better.

Jennifer and I are both very concerned with Section 2. Having patients be required to sign a piece of paper saying they had been informed of treatment options without time to look further into it would be disastrous for patients.

S. B. No. 782 AN ACT PROMOTING THE USE OF HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY. Again, we support the idea. Again, it is already in SustiNet.

H. B. No. 6674 AN ACT CONCERNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVED ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE SERVICES.

Another great idea that is also addressed in SustiNet.

S. B. No. 1121 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH PARITY AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHARTER OAK HEALTH PLAN.

The Charter Oak Plan is NOT a good plan for several reasons including unaffordable premiums for some, high deductibles, high copays, and relatively low caps on services. Worse than all of that is that there are very few providers participating. **However, as long as it is one of the plans offered by the state to state residents, it needs to follow the state's own law on mental health parity.** Mental Health coverage does not add a lot to the cost and may even save money by improving people's ability to heal.

In closing, we would like to thank you for how seriously you are looking into health care reform this session. We can do *much* better than the Charter Oak plan to provide quality, affordable, effective health care to ALL of Connecticut's residents. You have several good ideas before you today. However, SustiNet is the most complete Connecticut-specific plan for health care reform ready for action at the state legislature. It deserves a full debate with the full General Assembly. We urge you to pass this comprehensive approach rather than several small pieces that may or may not fit together in the end.